

News

Office of Medical Information
The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas
5323 Harry Hines Boulevard Dallas, Texas 75235-9060 214/688-3404

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CONTACT: Tommy Joy Bosler
Office: 214/688-3404
Home: 214/327-1773

****Dallas Biomedical Corporation
celebrates second anniversary

DALLAS -- Dallas Biomedical Corporation will be two years old March 19. Formed to bridge the gap between research at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas and the commercial marketplace, DBC is about to take its first big step out of academia and into competition. It has incorporated its first company and has three projects nearly ready to market.

"We are here to help the medical school and its scientists commercialize projects," said DBC President Devon Giacalone. "It has taken time to select and develop ideas, but now we have a track record: In 1987 we funded four projects and started our first company. We have funded four new projects in 1988. We are moving right along."

The new company, GeneScreen Inc., will operate a clinical laboratory to do genetic screening. "First, we are going after single gene disorders," said Giacalone. "Next, we will look into risk assessment and prevention of diseases with genetic components like atherosclerosis and Type I diabetes. Then, in the long term, we want to do genetic screening for susceptibility to cancer and psychiatric disorders."

GeneScreen's first commercial tests are resulting from several projects funded by DBC during the past year:

* Drs. J. Donald Capra and Philip Tucker, professors of microbiology, have adapted previously described genetic screening tests for cystic fibrosis, Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, and smoker's emphysema (alpha-one antitrypsin). According to Giacalone, the tests are perfected, but it will take another few months of clinical work "so that we can demonstrate to the outside world that we can run these tests with high reliability."

* Dr. Jennifer Cuthbert, assistant professor of internal medicine, and Dr. Peter Lipsky, professor of internal medicine and microbiology, have developed a test to detect familial hypercholesterolemia (FH). FH, which occurs in 1 out of 500 people, allows cholesterol to build up in the blood, leading to atherosclerosis and early heart attacks.

Dallas Biomedical Corporation has funded over 100 field trials of the Cuthbert-Lipsky test for FH. Giacalone reports that the tests have gone well, and the test should be ready for commercial use within the next six months. The two researchers are also working on a second streamlined version that takes only two days to produce results. That version will be used by Dallas Biomedical Corporation laboratories in the United States and licensed abroad.

(More)

* Dr. Scott Grundy, director of the Center for Human Nutrition at UT Southwestern, has developed a series of laboratory tests to provide a complete lipid profile for persons with high blood lipids. In addition to basic tests performed with a high degree of accuracy, Grundy's lipid profile offers highly specialized tests not otherwise available in the Dallas community. These include tests for several apolipoproteins and for LDL particle size, information important for the diagnosis and management of patients with high blood lipids.

The tests are currently being performed in the laboratories of the Center for Human Nutrition, but Dallas Biomedical Corporation will eventually set up an off-campus laboratory to do the lipid profiles.

One other project is still in the development phase:

* Dr. Michael V. Norgard, associate professor of microbiology, is working on a diagnostic detection system using DNA probes that promises to be simple, inexpensive and will lend itself to automation. "It's using DNA as a diagnosis system, and it's as simple as saying it's positive if a liquid turns a color and negative if it stays clear," said Giacalone. The technique would be applicable to large-scale diagnostic testing in the areas of infectious disease, genetic diseases, tissue typing for paternity testing and certain areas of bacterial antibiotic resistance testing, she said.

Dallas Biomedical Corporation is in the process of establishing a home for its clinical reference laboratory. GeneScreen Inc. moved into quarters on Stemmons Freeway near Motor Street on Feb. 15.

Giacalone, however, is looking beyond DBC's second anniversary. She said, "Everyone knows UT Southwestern has very strong science and research. The good news is that there is also science with clear commercial application, and we are working with the scientists who have those types of projects.

"Now that the first four projects we funded are well under way, we are ready to consider more. Near the end of the 1987 we received four more proposals that we have decided to fund. They are for a diagnostic test for autoimmune diseases, a device for NMR calibration, a DNA tissue bank and a line of new improved scientific instruments for laboratory research. So we have a very broad portfolio of opportunities to look forward to."

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Note: The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas comprises Southwestern Medical School, Southwestern Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences and Southwestern Allied Health Sciences School.